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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER
5 September 1978

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Namibia: Pressures in SWAPO to Continue the Guerrilla Struggle

Key Points

The leadership of the South-West Africa People's Organization is divided over whether SWAPO should continue the guerrilla struggle or support the Western proposals for a peaceful transition to independence in Namibia.

--Many key political and military leaders strongly distrust South Africa's motives in accepting the Western plan and urge that SWAPO continue fighting until South Africa withdraws from the territory.

--Many also fear they would stand little chance of being elected to an important post if they returned to Namibia.

Consequently, SWAPO terrorist activity will likely continue and possibly intensify in northern Namibia at least until a formal ceasefire goes into effect.

--If South Africa retaliates by launching a major strike against SWAPO bases deep inside Angola or Zambia, this could give some SWAPO leaders the excuse they have been seeking to renege on their acceptance of the Western plan.

--Even if SWAPO agrees to a ceasefire, some of its military commanders may attempt to continue guerrilla activities.

This memorandum was prepared in the Office of Regional and Political Analysis and coordinated with the Clandestine Services and the Office of Strategic Research. Questions and comments may be addressed to the author, [redacted]

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SWAPO is under strong pressure, however, from the frontline African states to accept the Western plan, including its ceasefire provisions.

*--The frontline states probably would oppose any effort--
either military or political--by SWAPO's militant leaders
to wreck a peaceful settlement.*

*--If SWAPO were denied the support and sanctuary of the
frontline states, it would not be able to sustain a
prolonged guerrilla war.*

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A Reluctant SWAPO

The South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), acting under strong pressure from the frontline states, only reluctantly accepted the Western proposals last July. As the prospect of pre-independence elections in Namibia draws closer, many of SWAPO's exiled leaders--including its president Sam Nujoma--are having second thoughts.

At a press conference in New York just after the UN Security Council designated a Special Representative for Namibia, Nujoma said SWAPO never actually accepted the Western plan, but agreed only to work within the framework of the proposals with SWAPO's reservations taken into account. More recently, Nujoma announced that SWAPO will not take part in elections until all South African troops are withdrawn from the territory. In several public addresses he has asserted that SWAPO will not stop its guerrilla attacks until all political prisoners are released, all repressive laws are abolished, and all South African troops in Namibia confined to base.

Most SWAPO leaders distrust South Africa's motives in accepting the Western proposals. [redacted] some still believe that Pretoria will never go through with the settlement. They suspect the West is in collusion with South Africa and that, once the exiled leaders return to Namibia, Pretoria will arrest them and expel the UN forces.

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Opposition to the Western plan is strongest within an Ovambo tribal faction of the exiled leadership that includes foreign affairs secretary Peter Mueshihange, deputy foreign secretary Himanyawa Shihepo, and Hidipo Hamutenya, who runs the UN Institute for Namibia. This group is very close to Nujoma and has considerable influence within the exiled leadership. Most members of the group fear they stand little chance of getting elected to important positions because they are not well known inside the territory. By returning to Namibia, they would also have to give up most of the creature comforts they now enjoy as exiled leaders, such as "company cars", good food, and foreign travel.

A smaller and more moderate faction within the exiled leadership, including labor secretary John Ya Otto, economic affairs secretary Ben Amadhila, and former SWAPO London representative Peter Katjavivi, feels the Western plan is reasonable and are willing to return. Most members of this faction are also better known inside Namibia. [redacted]

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[redacted] the majority of SWAPO's rank and file members fall into this camp. They--and most members of SWAPO's organization inside Namibia--believe the settlement plan can lead to true independence for the territory, and are anxious to get on with the task of nationbuilding.

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Military Differences

Similar divisions exist within SWAPO's military wing. Most of the cadre in the military wing believe that by "forcing" South Africa to accept the Western plan, SWAPO has accomplished its primary goal and obviated the need to continue fighting. Although some military officers share this view, there apparently is a large faction--led by SWAPO defense secretary Peter Namyemba--that asserts that SWAPO should continue military operations and training until all South African soldiers are confined to base in Namibia.

Namyemba is said to have called for a meeting of his commanders this month to discuss how the guerrilla struggle should be continued. The primary purpose of the meeting is to overcome the resistance of some of his officers who want to deemphasize military operations. Last July, Namyemba reportedly strongly urged his commanders to keep fighting. At that time, the commanders are said to have expressed support for this strategy, but warned Namyemba that because of the strong South African military presence in the territory they might not be able to motivate their troops to fight until Pretoria's forces were withdrawn from northern Namibia.

25X1 An emergency session of SWAPO's national executive was held in late August to discuss SWAPO's current strategy. 25X1

Although few details of the meeting are known, a decision apparently was made to continue the guerrilla struggle, but at the same time to go ahead and sign whatever documents come out of the UN Security Council debate on the implementation of the Western proposals. By agreeing to push simultaneously on the military and the political fronts, a serious split in the leadership probably was avoided, or at least postponed.

The leadership also may have reasoned that their bargaining position would be strengthened if the fighting continued. Some of the more moderate exiled leaders and most members of SWAPO's organization inside Namibia, however, can be expected to push hard for abandonment of the guerrilla struggle if the UN Security Council votes to accept UN Secretary General Waldheim's recommendations for implementing the Western proposals.

African Impatience

Nujoma's seeming refusal to cease guerrilla activities until SWAPO is assured of a South African withdrawal from Namibia has evoked a critical response from the frontline states. Individually and collectively, they have made it clear that SWAPO must accept the Western plan, including its

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ceasefire provisions. Nujoma's statements run contrary to the settlement plan that states that peace must be established before South African troops are withdrawn, political prisoners released, or most other aspects of the plan implemented.

Angola and Zambia lack the military capability to defend themselves effectively against South African military incursions into their territory, and they oppose SWAPO taking any action that would provoke another major South African retaliatory strike. President Kaunda is said to have been furious when he learned that SWAPO had attacked South African forces based at Katima Mulilo in late August. Kaunda maintains that he had previously sought and received Nujoma's personal assurances that SWAPO would not attack South African forces from Zambian territory so long as there was a chance the Western plan could be implemented.

Tanzanian President Nyerere and Angolan President Neto doubtless share Kaunda's impatience with SWAPO. Following the Katima Mulilo incident--which apparently resulted in a highly successful South African sweep of most of SWAPO's forward bases in southern Zambia--Nyerere told US officials that SWAPO "had acted badly". He said SWAPO forces should only be reacting to specific South African provocations.

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Although SWAPO's political leadership probably did not specifically order the attack on Katima Mulilo, SWAPO military commanders in Zambia and Angola are said to be under standing orders to harass South Africa forces. Given the recent increase in the number of terrorist actions along the Namibian border, Nujoma apparently has not issued new instructions to his guerrilla forces and may even be encouraging them to initiate such attacks.

Outlook

Small scale guerrilla activity most likely will continue and might even intensify in northern Namibia after a ceasefire is announced because of difficulties in communicating with local SWAPO commanders, the inability of Angola and Zambia fully to control guerrilla forces in their territory, and the predisposition of some SWAPO military commanders to continue guerrilla operations regardless of political developments. In fact, some guerrilla commanders may be hoping that by continuing their attacks they might provoke a major South African incursion such as the raid on SWAPO's Cassinga base last May. Such an attack, they would argue, would provide SWAPO with sufficient justification to renege on its acceptance of the Western proposals.

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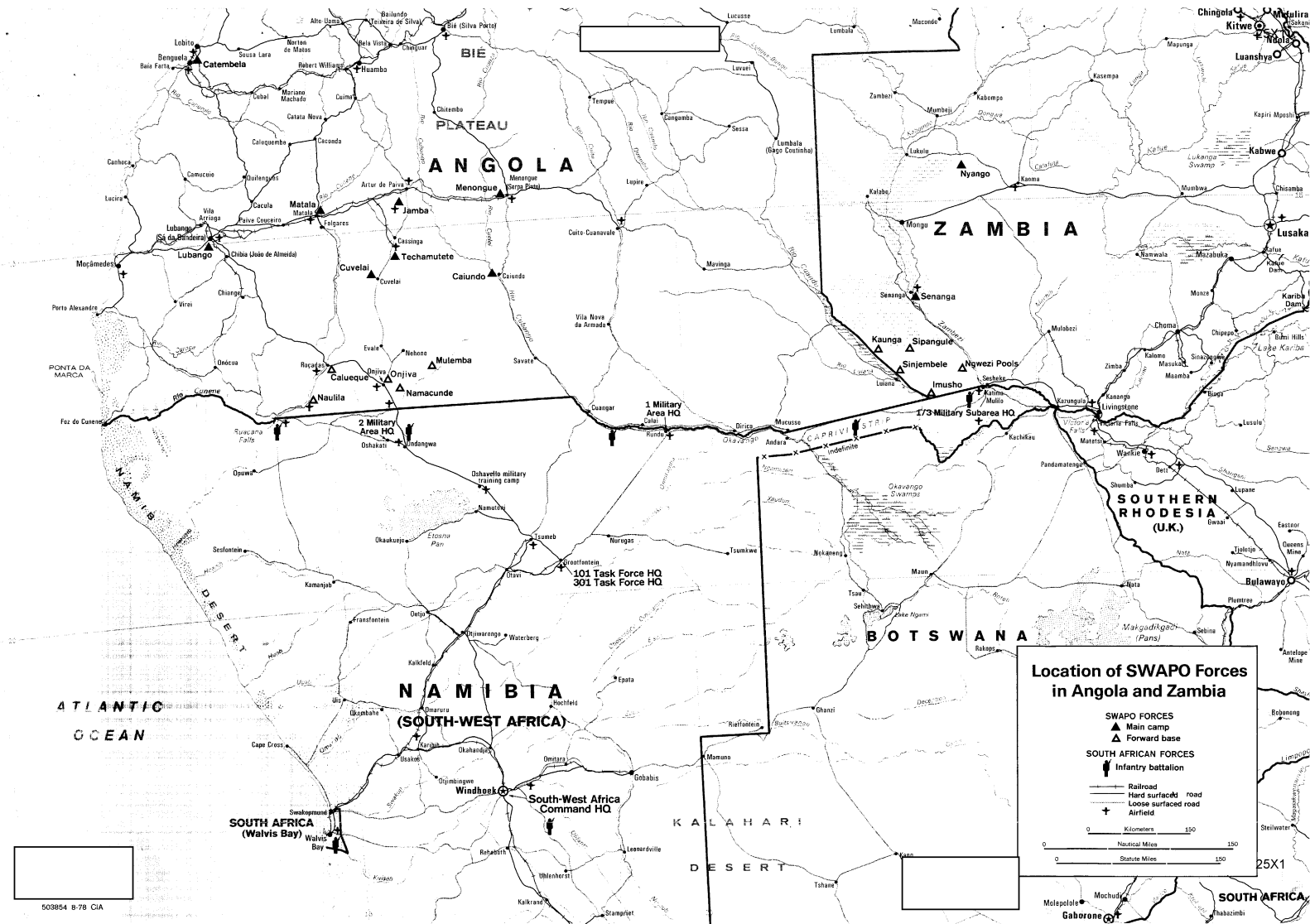
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The frontline states doubtless would join SWAPO in condemning the South African attack, but they would resist allowing such an incident to wreck prospects for a negotiated settlement, particularly if SWAPO provoked the attack and the transition process was well underway.

If SWAPO's more militant exiled leaders decided to ignore the urgings of the frontline states and unilaterally rejected a negotiated settlement, they probably could not sustain a guerrilla war if denied sanctuary in Angola and Zambia. Neto is said to have told SWAPO, when it was deciding whether to accept the Western plan, that SWAPO would have to operate from the Atlantic Ocean if it wanted to continue fighting. Although Neto may not be able to halt all SWAPO guerrilla activity inside his country, he--as well as President Kaunda--probably could prevent any organized or large scale guerrilla operations from being staged across his borders.

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